

Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515-3313

February 23, 2022

Mary Davis  
Chief Executive Officer  
Special Olympics, Inc.  
1133 19th Street NW  
Washington, DC 20036-3604

Dear Ms. Davis:

The Olympic Games are the most important competition many athletes will participate in over the course of their entire lives. Athletes train for years in preparation for this prestigious event. In the spirit of the games, the Special Olympics has provided a playing field for over 5 million athletes with disabilities. That number does not begin to reflect the number of lives the Special Olympics has improved, and for that I thank you. Creating a stage for these athletes to display their hard work provides many benefits for not only the athletes but for their coaches, trainers, families, and friends. Just like those competing in the 2022 Winter Games, the athletes of the Special Olympics will cherish these memories for the rest of their lives.

Unfortunately, your organization has taken a stance that will alienate and exclude some of these athletes. The Special Olympics has implemented a policy requiring every athlete at this year's competition to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 and has yet to provide an exemption process. I have serious concerns about a one-size-fits-all policy being forced on athletes who may very well have legitimate reasons to not receive the vaccine. I have constituents in my districts who are facing the prospect of not being able to participate due to this policy. Given their conditions, most Special Olympic athletes have a close relationship with their doctor. Each athlete should be given an individual choice, in consultation with their doctor, on whether to receive the vaccine. Implementing a universal policy without reasonable medical and religious exemptions will inevitably exclude some athletes. Given the Special Olympics' inclusive mission, I hope you will reconsider the full ramifications of this policy.

In addition, there are several mitigation measures available for the upcoming Special Olympics USA games in Orlando, Florida. First and foremost, many of the competition events and venues will be outdoors where virus spread is minimal. Second, I understand you are developing a broader mitigation protocol that may involve masks, handwashing, and social distancing. These measures, combined with voluntary vaccination and readily available therapeutics, significantly reduce the negative effects associated with COVID-19.

Last November, Florida enacted legislation to protect parents' rights to make healthcare decisions for their children. That law prohibits government vaccine mandates and requires employers to recognize several exemptions, including: health or religious concerns, pregnancy or

anticipated future pregnancy, and past recovery from COVID-19, and regular testing. While this legislation may not apply to your organization, I strongly urge you to allow for exemptions for these exemptions for the sake of those athletes who desperately want to compete.

I stand for those brave athletes who have worked hard preparing for the opportunity to compete in the upcoming Special Olympic games. Your one-size-fits-all policy fails to account for mitigation measures, does not consider individual medical concerns, and will ultimately exclude athletes from an event designed to be inclusive. I urge you to reconsider your stance on requiring all participating athletes of the Special Olympics to be forced to take a vaccine.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Ted Budd". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ted" and last name "Budd" clearly distinguishable.

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Ted Budd  
Member of Congress